

Keeping your mind over your matters.

Bullying Prevention Conversation Starters...

[How To Talk With Your Child Who Is Bullying](#)

[How To Talk With Your Child Who Is Being Bullied](#)

[How To Talk With Your Child Who Is A Bullying Bystander](#)

How To Talk With Your Child Who Is Bullying

According to Premier Psychological Services Founder and Clinical Psychotherapist Nancy L. Peskin, MSW, LCSW and Licensed Psychologist (Clinical, Clinical Child) JoAnna Snider Anderson, Psy.D, parents should always take a proactive role in the lives of their children and their children's circle of friends in order to determine whether their child is behaving aggressively to other classmates or friends. The following examples are ways to get the conversation rolling with your child based on age appropriate stages of cognitive and emotional development.

Ages 5 - 9

With this age group, it will be helpful for parents to approach their child by using questions that revolve around friendship and then gently but assertively lay down the family rules. For example, you may suggest to your child "I notice that you're having a hard time getting along with Johnny" or "I see that you have a hard time being Steve's friend." And then state the rules: "We don't shove people" or "We don't hit". Then be sure to state family rules such as "You DO share," "You do have to wait your turn at school," etc.

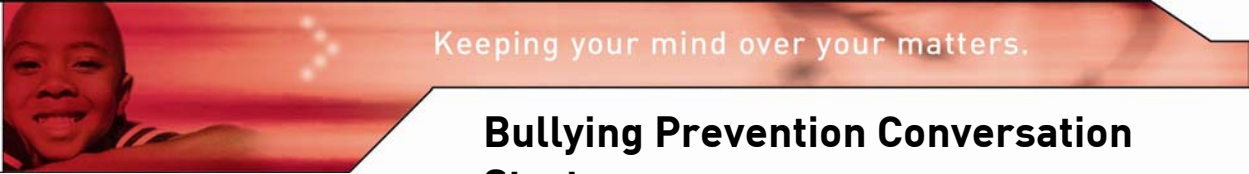
Ages 10 - 12

This is one of the most difficult age groups as it relates to peer and school relationships. Parents need to be observant of their child's interactions, aware of their child's activities with peer groups and engage their child in regular discussions about relationships. It is also important to remind them of negative consequences for continued bad behaviors. You can be direct at this age and ask "So what's going on?" "What caused you to treat Eddie that way?" Refrain from referring to your child as a bully. Point out inconsistencies about your child's responses and behaviors. Be sure to offer your child a positive alternative than the current behaviors they are choosing. "Instead of talking about what you don't like about Mary to all your friends, why don't you find something you do like about her or even talk directly to Mary about your feelings. If you need help on how to do this, just ask and I'll help you." Let them know that privileges related to social interactions will be revoked, such as no phone use for a week, or missing the upcoming school dance, etc.

Ages 13 and up

This is the time to regularly engage your child in a conversation about his or her network of friends and classmates. Ask specific questions about their day at school such as "So when you're at school and someone bumps into you, what do you do?" or "If someone is really overweight in your school, how do you treat them?" Start a conversation with your young teenager on how we do treat people. "Do you see Mom or Dad treating people that way?" Emphasize consequences to their behaviors, such as loss of desired privileges. During the teenage years, it is a good idea to start a discussion on how bullying behavior can interfere with them being successful in life and set them up instead for a life of suspensions, detentions, personal harm, or even police involvement. This is a good age to share personal examples of your own experiences as a teenager at school when someone wasn't treated well. Then ask your child if he or she is friends with anyone like that. Have your teenager verbalize what kind of outcomes can be expected with bullying behavior. "What do you think should happen to you if you always shove Tom into the locker at school?" "What would be a better course of action for you to take that will not get you in trouble but also let you share what you are feeling towards Tom?"

If you're son or daughter has trouble understanding the consequences or refuses to recognize the serious nature of his or her actions, and you, as their parent feel overwhelmed and not sure what else to do, you may need to consider getting professional help so that your child does not travel further down the road of violence.



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[How To Talk With Your Child Who Is Being Bullied](#)

If your child is a victim of bullying, the following examples are ways to get the conversation rolling with your child based on age appropriate stages of cognitive and emotional development.

Ages 5 – 9

With this age group, it will be helpful for parents to approach their child with questions regarding the child's perceptions of what happened. Ask your child if he or she perceives him/herself has having been bullied. The parent should explore whether this is an ongoing or a one time occurrence. If it is the first instance, the parent should be watchful for a continuing pattern. If you do have a pattern of bullying, then these are the things parents ought to know: Where is the interaction occurring and whether it appears adult support is available, i.e. "Is your teacher there when this happens?" Secondly, talk with your child about ways to help him or her advocate for themselves in non-violent ways. Give the child specific things to do such as "if Johnny pushes you, say "Stop it" or "Leave me alone". If they push your child again, instruct your child to verbally advocate again. Should it continue, instruct your child to seek help from an adult with the instruction "I told Johnny twice to leave me alone, and he won't." This lets the adult know that your child attempted to handle the situation, but now needs adult intervention. This saves your child from being labeled a tattler. At this young age, expect your child to want to retaliate. Try to get your child to respond with alternative ways. Get the school involved by making them aware of the problem.

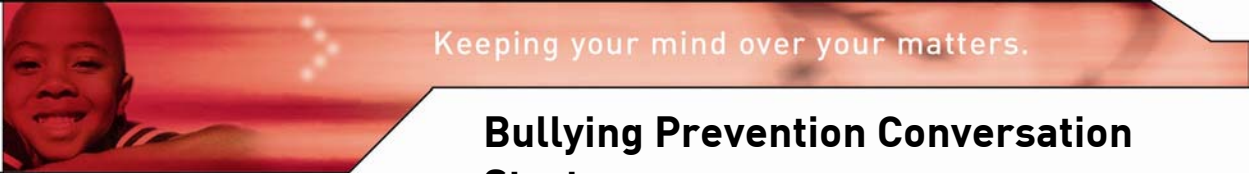
Ages 10 – 12

This is one of the most difficult age groups as it relates to peer and school relationships. Parents need to be observant of their child's interactions, aware of their child's activities with peer groups and engage their child in regular discussions about relationships. At this age, they are going to be less willing to seek adult intervention. Bullying at this age may also begin to go from physical to more indirect ways of bullying, such as verbal, internet, threats. If you suspect that your child is being bullied, open the dialog with your child regarding where it is occurring, their perception of the interaction and how they respond. While peer groups are so important at this age, it is vital for parents to equip their children with advocacy skills and an open dialog so that your child can talk with you about what is going on. It is important to teach your child to be less reactive to the bullying, thus not encouraging the bully to continue. Try to expose your child to alternate peer groups and increase positive peer interaction. Also at this age, the bullying may be occurring outside of school, which will restrict the schools ability to be involved. Regardless, it is important to let the school know of the issue. You may need to advocate with other parents and monitor your child's interactions, moods and comments. You need to take action to protect your child from situations that may fuel bullying. You may need to increase your involvement and supervision in your child's activities.

Ages 13 and up

This is the time to regularly engage your child in a conversation about his or her network of friends and classmates. You might engage in a conversation with them like "Are there any kids in your school who are being bullied? What happens to them at school?" "Have those things ever happened to you?" "So when you're at school and someone intentionally shoves you, what do you do?" Bullying at this age tends to be less overtly physical and more covert, but can quickly escalate into violence, especially with boys. With girls, bullying trends more toward psychological attacks. Parents need to be observant of changes in their child's behavior as there may be less verbal discussion as to what is happening on a day to day basis. You may notice more withdrawal, change in amount of time spent with peers, increase in somatic complaints that allow them to miss school, a change in homework patterns and academic performance. This is a good age to share personal examples of your own experiences as a teenager at school when someone wasn't treated well. Then ask your child if he or she is friends with anyone like that or if they have had an experience like that. Offer your teenager help with solving the problem via self advocacy, alternate peer groups, and ways to increase their self confidence. Treat it as a problem that CAN be solved.

If your son or daughter is experiencing being bullied, and you as their parent notice behavioral changes at any age, feel overwhelmed and not sure what else to do, you may need to consider getting professional help so that your child does not further become a victim.



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Bullying Prevention Conversation Starters...

[How To Talk With Your Child Who Is A Bullying Bystander](#)

If your child is watching acts of bullying as a “bystander”, the following are examples to get the conversation started based on age appropriate stages of cognitive and emotional development.

Ages 5 – 9

With this age group, it will be helpful for parents to approach their child by using questions that revolve around their friends. For example, you may ask your child, “Have you seen any of your friends being bullied? or “I noticed that your friend Johnny was being teased (bullied, pushed, hit etc) by your friend Sally, does that happen often?”. The parent should explore whether this is an ongoing experience. Then be sure to state your family rules and expectations about how you want them to respond to such an act. Children need to learn that by standing by and watching can sometimes be as harmful as if they are bullying someone too.

If you determine that your child is being exposed to others being bullied, then these are the things parents ought to know: Where is the interaction occurring and whether it appears adult support is available, ie: “Is your teacher there when this happens?” Secondly, talk with you child about how they can be a non-violent advocate for the bullied child. Give them specific things to do such as “if you see your friend or another child being bullied, say 'Stop it ' or 'Leave him/her alone’”. If the bullying continues, instruct your child to seek help from an adult with the instruction “I told Johnny twice to leave Sally alone, and he didn’t.” This lets the adult know that your child attempted to handle the situation, but now needs adult intervention. Just as in the “being the victim of a bully example”, it saves your child from being labeled a tattler. Get the school involved by making them aware that these kinds of problems are occurring.

Ages 10 – 12

As mentioned earlier, this is one of the most difficult age groups as it relates to peer and school relationships. Parents need to be observant of their child’s interactions and activities with peer groups and engage their child in regular discussions about these relationships. Again, at this age, they are going to be less willing to seek adult intervention. Bystanding at this age may also become equally as powerful as actually “doing” the bullying. Especially since pre-teens are becoming very conscious of peer to peer status and expectations. If you suspect your child is observing bullying, open the dialogue about where it’s happening, what they think about it and how they respond when observing those actions.

While peer groups are so important at this age, it is vital for parents to equip their pre-teen children with options that foster safety and reduces peer pressure preserving and enhancing relationships with their friends. Also at this age, observing or “bystanding” may be occurring outside of school, which will restrict the schools ability to be involved. Regardless, it is important to let the school know of these issues. You may need to advocate with other parents. You need to take action with your child at this age because as they grow older, the instances of observing more extreme forms of bullying will increase. If you have established an open line of regular communication about these kinds of things before they get big, then when faced with more serious issues, you and your child will have had enough positive experiences and comfort talking where bigger and more serious issues should be less confrontational or emotional. In short, practice on smaller events makes for a stronger foundation of trust when the bigger issues arise.

Ages 13 and up

This is the time to regularly engage your child in ongoing conversations about his or her network of friends and classmates. If you’ve established a comfort level and trust talking about these kinds of things at an earlier age, these conversations will be much easier! A great way to approach this age group is through casual conversations woven into other activities. This is a great way to ping or mine for bits of information you can build on. Ways to begin these kinds of conversations are when you are doing other errands together in the car or when you may be in-between other activities where you can engage in shorter conversations. The point here is to be able to get a conversation



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thread started that you can continue to build on. Letting your teen know that you are available to talk without 'wiggling out' is a good way to gain trust.

Teenagers rarely like to talk directly face to face to adults about things that are going on with them. As mentioned above, you can bet your child is observing some pretty heavy bullying by this age. If you have practiced talking with your child about smaller less volatile issues you will increase your chances of gather more information about how you can advise them to safely address or mitigate "bystanding" or witnessing acts of bullying. You might try things like "I heard on the radio today about some kids at another school who were bullied about (insert here whatever the topic is you would like to know about) and other kids were standing around watching." then follow with "What happens when other kids are watching this kind of thing happen at your school?" continuing, "So when you're at school and someone shoves (picks on, teases, harasses etc) someone in front of you, what do you do?"

This is a good time to share your personal experiences and examples of how you'd recommend they could handle or advocate for their friends without being labeled. Offer your teenager help with solving specific issues they've witnessed. Allow them to participate in possible solutions and options and jointly create several plans for addressing what is happening. Treat it as a problem that CAN be solved together.

If your son or daughter is noticing their friends and peers being bullied at school, you may need to contact the school and/or seek professional help. It is important for your child, who may feel they are next on the bully's list feel safe. Fear and anxiety can affect their grades, their emotions and their self-esteem.

Nancy L. Peskin, MSW, LCSW, Founder and President of Premier Psychological Services

(www.premierpsychservices.com), a clinic that specializes in comprehensive evaluations and therapy for children, adolescents and adults who have attentional, behavioral, cognitive and academic problems in school, work, home or social settings. After earning her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh where she was the recipient of the Dean's Scholar Award, she spent several years in an inpatient hospital setting conducting research and providing therapy to adolescents and adults who were struggling with anxiety, mood and eating disorders. After much soul searching, she left the hospital to develop and launch a successful out-patient mental health clinic within a rural medical facility for underprivileged children and families outside her hometown of Pittsburgh, Pa. She provided numerous seminars at public and private schools, doctor's offices, church youth groups, and community chamber meetings on childhood disorders/treatments before moving to Houston in 2001 to begin providing specialized services for children and adolescents.

JoAnna Snider Anderson, Psy. D. is a Licensed Psychologist (Clinical) who received her Doctorate of Psychology from Spalding University with an emphasis in childhood disorders. In addition to her consulting contributions with Premier, she also provides comprehensive psychological services for children with neurological differences in a private therapeutic school environment. Dr. Anderson also has significant training in the ADD/ADHD assessment process. Her expertise enables her to consider other conditions or developmental disorders that might co-exist with ADD/ADHD or, in some cases, better explain the difficulties found within the family seeking help for their presenting problems.

About MindOH!

MindOH! was founded in 2000 to provide young people, educators and parents with the necessary tools to help develop strong character traits and healthy self-concepts. The Company creates character-based, interactive tools that teach students problem-solving techniques and communication skills, reinforcing universally held virtues such as respect and responsibility. MindOH!'s *Discipline and Life Skills Series*™ (DLSS) and MindOH!'s *At Home Series*™ (AHS) incorporate scientifically based research and adapt successfully in multiple environments, such as home, education, juvenile justice and youth organizations. In 2001 MindOH! extended their commitment to character education by starting the MindOH! Foundation (www.mindohfoundation.org). Every year, the MindOH! Foundation sponsors the Character's Cool Contest which is a national, online contest for kids to reflect on what it means to have good character. For more information, visit www.mindoh.com.